

Drainage

A major drainage divide extending through the middle of Utah separates the state into two principal drainage systems, the Great Basin and Colorado River. These two systems are notably different in that the Great Basin is a region of internal drainage while the Colorado River empties eventually into the Gulf of California. The divide between these two drainage areas extends generally through the High Plateaus and across the western end of the Uinta Mountains. In the southwestern corner of the state this divide trends westward into Nevada.

There are two large terminal lakes within the Utah portion of the Great Basin. One of them, the Great Salt Lake, is a true inland sea having a high salt content and no outlet. The second, Sevier Lake, is a playa which is dry most of the time due to the extensive use of its tributary waters for irrigation. Only during heavy precipitation will Sevier Lake receive significant runoff.

Bear River Drainage The Great Salt Lake receives runoff from three major river systems: the Bear, Weber, and Jordan. The Bear River, having a total length of over 300 miles, originates in Utah on the north flank of the western portion of the Uinta Mountains. It flows northward into Wyoming and Idaho, bends sharply around the northernmost extension of the Wasatch Range, then heads south and eventually enters Utah's Cache Valley, where its major tributaries are Little Bear River, Blacksmith Fork, and Logan River. Bear Lake receives runoff from the eastern flank of the Bear River Range as well as mountains and hills to the south and east. It drains northward into the Bear River in Idaho.

Weber River Drainage The Weber River has its headwaters on the northwestern flank of the Uinta Mountains and receives runoff from all of Morgan County and much of Weber and Summit counties. Its major tributary, the Ogden River, drains Ogden Valley and the eastern portion of Weber County.

southern portion of the Sevier Valley and the Markagunt Plateau. Its major tributaries include the East Fork, which heads high up on the Paunsaugunt Plateau just to the west of Bryce Canyon National Park; Otter Creek, which drains the western slope of the Fish Lake Plateau; and the San Pitch River, which drains Sanpete Valley and the western slope of the Wasatch Plateau. The Sevier River flows northward through the Sevier Valley, continues west of the Gunnison Plateau, and, after cutting through the Canyon Mountains, bends southward past Delta into Sevier Lake.

Colorado River Drainage The Colorado River drainage system is dominated by the Colorado River and its major tributary, the Green. The Green River originates in Wyoming's Wind River Mountains, flows through Flaming Gorge, dips into the state of Colorado where it is joined by the Yampa River, and then turns southwest and south into the Canyonlands. Major tributaries of the Green River are the Duchesne and Uinta rivers, draining the Uinta Mountains; the White River, draining Colorado's Roan Plateau; the Price River, draining the Wasatch Plateau; and the San Rafael River, draining the San Rafael Swell.

Above its confluence with the Green, the Colorado River has several small, intermittent tributaries, the largest being the Dolores River with its headwaters in Colorado. Below the confluence three major tributaries, as well as numerous intermittent ones, are found. The Dirty Devil River has two major branches—Muddy Creek and the Fremont River—which drain portions of the San Rafael Swell and the eastern flank of the High Plateaus. The Dirty Devil now joins the Colorado by flowing into Lake Powell. The Escalante River also empties into Lake Powell after receiving runoff from the eastern flank of the High Plateaus. The San Juan has its headwaters in the Four Corners area and most of its runoff is from Colorado. The San Juan also empties into Lake Powell, and its canyon forms one of the lake's major arms.

River and Goose Creek mountains. Although this area occupies only a small portion of the state, its runoff eventually flows into the Columbia River, the primary drainage system of the Northwest.

Reservoirs A system of dams and reservoirs developed in Utah has become an integral part of the state's economy. This system involves practically every perennial stream in the state and provides water storage, flood control, electrical power production, and recreation. Practically every city and farm in Utah is dependent upon dams to guarantee a year-round supply of water for domestic, industrial, and agricultural use. Glen Canyon Dam, which contains Lake Powell, also has the function of regulating and guaranteeing the flow of water from the Upper Colorado River Basin states to the lower basin states. Both the Lake Powell and Flaming Gorge reservoirs are of national importance and have been integrated into the National Park system as national recreation areas. Lake Powell has a capacity of 25 million acre-feet and extends 186 miles up the Colorado River. Flaming Gorge has a capacity of 3.7 million acre-feet and extends 37 miles into Wyoming.

For reference, see Bibliography, number 320

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Reservoirs	
Name	Capacity (in acre-feet)
Bottle Hollow	11,300
Causey	6,900
Deer Creek	149,700
East Canyon	48,100
Echo	73,900
Flaming Gorge	3,749,000
Gunnison	18,200
Huntington North	3,900
Hyrum	15,300
Joe's Valley	54,600
Lake Powell	25,002,000
Lost Creek	20,000
Mill Site	16,700
Minersville	23,300
Moon Lake	35,800
Otter Creek	52,500
Pineview	110,100
Piute	71,800
Porcupine	11,300
Rockport	60,900
Scofield	65,800
Settlement Creek	1,200
Sevier Bridge	236,000
Starvation	165,300
Steinaker	33,700
Strawberry	270,000
Vernon Creek	600
Willard Bay	193,300
Woodruff Narrows	26,000

Jordan River Drainage The 40-mile-long Jordan River connects Utah Lake with the Great Salt Lake. Utah Lake, one of the larger natural bodies of fresh water in the western United States, receives much of its water from the Provo and Spanish Fork rivers. The Provo River originates in the southwestern margin of the Uinta Mountains and drains portions of Wasatch, Summit, and Utah counties, while the Spanish Fork River and its tributaries drain portions of the southern Wasatch Range. Other important drainages into Utah Lake are Hobbie Creek and American Fork River.

Sevier River Drainage One major river, the Sevier, empties into Sevier Lake. Very little water from the Sevier actually reaches the lake at the present time, and therefore the lake fills only intermittently. The Sevier River carries much of the runoff from the High Plateaus and has its headwaters in

additional drainage systems are located within the southwest corner of the state that flow southward out of the state before emptying into the Colorado. The Paria River heads along the east and south margins of the High Plateaus and flows into Arizona, meeting the Colorado River at Lee's Ferry. The Virgin River system, along with the Santa Clara River and La Verkin Creek, drains the Pine Valley Mountains as well as the Zion National Park area on the south flank of the High Plateaus. The Virgin River flows into Arizona through the spectacular Virgin River Canyon before entering Nevada, where it joins the Colorado River at Lake Mead.

Raft River Drainage A third drainage system flowing out of Utah is found in the northwest corner of the state. Here the Raft River and several additional tributaries of the Raft courses drain the northern slopes of the